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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000016

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SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTION PREVIEW: KMT SEEKS SWEEP IN
NORTHEAST TAIWAN, OFFSHORE ISLANDS AND ABORIGINE
CONSTITUENCIES

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director Robert S. Wang,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: In the January 12 Legislative Yuan (LY) elections, the pan-Blue camp is expected to win at least 10 of the 11 seats in northeastern Taiwan, the offshore islands of Matsu and Kinmen, and the two aborigine constituencies. With the exception of rural Ilan County, these districts and constituencies are all Blue strongholds, and the DPP would do well to pick up 1-2 seats. If the DPP loses the race in Ilan -- the lone Green majority district in northeastern Taiwan -- the Blue could sweep all 11 seats and further increase its dominance in this region. End Summary.

12. (SBU) This cable, the final in a series of regional reports in the run-up to the January 12 Legislative Yuan (LY) elections, includes information from meetings with party officials, local candidates, and media reports. Para 3 provides a general summary of the northeastern region, the districts of Lienchiang (Matsu) and Kinmen, and the two island-wide aborigine constituencies. Paras 4-11 provide capsules on each of the districts and constituencies.

All But One Are Blue Strongholds

13. (C) With one week to go before voters head to the polls to elect the next Legislative Yuan (LY), the Blue camp could win all of the 11 seats up for grabs in northeastern Taiwan (Keelung City and Ilan and Hualien Counties), the island districts of Kinmen and Matsu, and the two aborigine constituencies. The lone district where the Green camp has a traditional advantage is Ilan County, but the DPP candidate, who is relatively weak and is campaigning on ideological themes, faces a KMT opponent who has strong grassroots support. In addition to a strong lineup of candidates from the KMT, contenders from the People First Party (PFP) -- who in other districts across the island are running under the KMT flag -- and Blue independents figure prominently in several of the races.

Keelung City (1 seat): Likely to Go KMT

14. (C) Keelung City on Taiwan's northern coast is a major

port city closely integrated with Taipei city to the south. With a population of 390,000, Keelung has always been a Blue stronghold, with Blue candidates outpolling Green candidates by a 6-4 margin in recent elections. Incumbent KMT legislator Hsieh Kuo-liang is likely to win his bid for reelection, although local DPP party officials told AIT that DPP candidate Yu Hsiang-yao had recently narrowed the gap. The DPP's chances of pulling off an upset, however, were dealt a blow when Wang Hsing-chih, the son of DPP legislator and caucus leader Wang Tuoh, decided to enter the race as a Green Party candidate. Local officials said the Keelung economy, which is heavily dependent on shipping, would reap handsome benefits from further opening to the mainland -- a longtime KMT position -- due to its proximity to southeastern China.

Ilan County (1 seat): Blues Could Grab Seat in Green Area

15. (C) Ilan County (population 460,000) is the only administrative area in northern Taiwan where Green supporters have traditionally outnumbered Blue supporters, although the gap may have narrowed somewhat in recent years. In Ilan, although President Chen beat the pan-Blue ticket by 15 percent in 2004 and Green candidates outpolled Blue candidates by a 7 percent margin in the 2004 LY elections, the KMT's Lu Kuo-hua won the county magistrate race in 2005. The contest for Ilan's lone LY seat pits KMT incumbent Lin Chien-jung against DPP incumbent Chen Chin-de, and officials from both parties predict the race will be decided in the final weeks of the campaign. Lin is stronger than Chen on grassroots work and constituent services. Chen is trying to play up ideological themes promoted by President Chen,

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defining the election as a choice between Taiwan and China. The outcome of this election may provide some indication of whether voters are more interested in ideological or practical issues.

Hualien County (1 seat): Blue Stronghold

16. (C) Hualien County (population 350,000) on Taiwan's east coast is a traditional Blue stronghold, and the pan-Blue Lien/Soong ticket captured over 70 percent of the vote here in the 2004 presidential election. The two incumbent Hualien legislators, Fu Kun-chi of the KMT and Lu Po-chi of the DPP, are contesting the county's single seat under the new electoral system. Taking advantage of a split Blue vote in the 2004 LY elections, Lu was able to win a seat with only 30 percent of the vote, but he will find it difficult to defeat Fu in a one-on-one showdown.

Matsu (1 seat): A Fight Among Blue Candidates

17. (C) Voters in Lienchiang County (Matsu - population 10,000) are longtime supporters of the Blue camp. Green candidates won less than 6 percent of the vote in the 2004 legislative and presidential elections. The greatest challenge to the re-election bid of four-time KMT LY incumbent Tsao Erh-chang comes from PFP candidate Lin Hui-kuan. The KMT and the PFP agreed to jointly field candidates under the KMT flag in the geographic districts on Taiwan and the at-large party lists, but the PFP is running its own candidates in Matsu and in the two Taiwan-wide aborigine constituencies. The DPP's Tsao Cheng-ti is unlikely to eke out a victory even if there is a 50-50 split between the two Blue candidates.

Kinmen County (one seat): Another Contest Between Blues

18. (C) Kinmen County (population 80,000) is another blue stronghold, and candidates from the green camp won just 6

percent of the vote in the 2004 legislative and presidential elections. Three Blue candidates, Wu Cheng-tien of the KMT and independents Li Wo-shih and Chen Fu-hai, all have a chance of winning the county's LY seat.

Aborigine Constituencies (six seats): Blues Could Sweep

¶9. (C) Six LY members will be elected by Taiwan's aborigines, which comprise about 2 percent of Taiwan's population of 23 million. The aboriginal ethnic groups are split into two Taiwan-wide constituencies -- the plains aborigines and the mountain aborigines -- with each group allotted three seats. The two aborigine constituencies have retained the single non-transferable vote balloting used for all district legislators in previous LY elections, meaning that voters will cast one vote for their favorite candidate in the constituency to which they belong. The the top three vote-getters in each of the two constituencies will win seats. The Blue camp has historically had a strong advantage in the aborigine constituencies, winning 7 of the 8 seats contested in 2004.

¶10. (C) Five candidates are running for the three plains aborigine seats, including Liao Kuo-tung and Yang Jen-fu of the KMT and Lin Cheng-er of the PFP, all of whom are two-time incumbent legislators. The Blue camp has historically held an overwhelming advantage in the plains aborigine constituency, winning 65 percent of the vote in the 2004 LY elections, compared to 15 percent for green candidates. Chen Shui-hui, the lone DPP candidate, is hoping to duplicate the feat of Chen Ying, who became the party's first directly elected aboriginal legislator in 2004 by successfully unifying the Green minority behind her candidacy. The fifth candidate, independent Sung Chin-tsai, narrowly missed winning a seat in the 2004 election, collecting 11 percent of the vote.

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¶11. (C) The mountain aborigine constituency is another traditional pan-Blue stronghold: in the 2004 LY elections the Blue camp captured three seats, the fourth going to a legislator from the Non-Partisan Solidarity Union (NPSU). Two Green candidates captured just 12 percent of the vote between them. In the upcoming elections, seven candidates have registered to run for the three seats allotted to mountain aborigines under the new electoral system, although the race is likely to come down to five candidates. Kung Wen-chi of the KMT, Lin Chun-te of the PFP, and Kao Chin Su Mei of the NPSU -- all incumbent legislators -- are strong candidates. Also in the race are Chien Tung-ming of the KMT, who has endeavored to take over the support base of a retiring KMT legislator, and DPP candidate Ho Chin-chu, formerly from the Blue camp. Ho faces a very difficult uphill battle in his quest to win one of the three mountain aborigine seats.

YOUNG